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The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign

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Press communique

Protest against Timor Gap Treaty at Australian High Commission

Leaders of the East Timor National Convergence and representatives of East Timor solidarity groups in Europe went to the Australian High Commission in London today to protest at Australia's decision to enter into a treaty with Indonesia for exploitation of oil resources in the so-called Timor Gap. The Timor Gap Treaty, signed in December by Senator Gareth Evans and Ali Alatas, the foreign ministers of Australia and Indonesia, provides for joint exploitation of oil resources in the seabed between Australia and East Timor, one of the world's richest deposits of oil and natural gas.

Abilio Araujo (Fretilin) and Dr Paulo Pires (UDT), of the National Convergence, and members of TAPOL (UK), Agir pour Timor (France) and Imbas (West Germany) gave Mr Peter Zoller, Political Counsellor, the final communique of a meeting of East Timor solidarity groups in London which condemns the treaty as a contract for the division of property stolen from the people of East Timor; it calls on Portugal, recognised by the UN as the administering power of East Timor, to file a complaint against the illegality of the treaty with the International Court of Justice.

The protesters told Mr Zoller that the treaty was an act of betrayal by Australia of its close neighbour, the people of East Timor. Australia had entered into this contract even though the UN refused to accept the incorporation of East Timor by Indonesia; moreover, consultations were under way between Indonesia and Portugal, under UN auspices, to find a solution to the question of East Timor which has been denied its self-determination. Australia's collusion with Indonesia to exploit the seabed resources could enhance Indonesia's position vis-a-vis Portugal in the negotiations.

The Political Counsellor said that although Australia "had been unhappy" with the manner of the incorporation of East Timor in 1975, it had decided to "accept reality". By accepting reality, he said, Australia could continue dialogue with Indonesia "over issues that concern us such as human rights".

Abilio Araujo of Fretilin said that there were several realities in East Timor, the reality of Indonesia's illegal and barbaric takeover which had brought death and destruction to about a third of the population of East Timor and also the reality of the resistance of the East Timorese people who could not accept Indonesian annexation. He also recalled that since 1975, Australian governments had claimed that East Timor lacks the economic resources to be a viable independent state yet it was now exploiting petroleum resources of great worth that were the property of East Timor.

Replying to the Australian Government's assertion that it continued to monitor and respond to human rights abuses in East Timor and worked closely with Amnesty International on many issues, Carmel Budiardjo of TAPOL reminded Mr Zoller that the Indonesian authorities had refused permission to Amnesty to investigate conditions in East Timor; she urged the Australian Government to put pressure on the Indonesian authorities to allow Amnesty into East Timor, as recommended by a recent resolution of the UN human rights sub-commission.

In conclusion, Mr Zoller promised to convey the points which had been raised to the Australian Government.

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